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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000783

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE
AFR/SA FOR E. LOKEN
COMMERCE FOR BECKY ERKUL\
TREASURY FOR J. RALYEA AND B. CUSHMAN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: MUTARE BISHOP ON DIALOGUE WITH MUGABE, NATIONAL
RECONCILIATION

REF: (A) 2004 HARARE 1434 (C) 2003 HARARE 1599 (C)

2003 HARARE 1599 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

[11](#). (C) In a June 29 meeting with the Ambassador, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe Bishop Trevor Manhanga said President Mugabe seemed genuine in his recent efforts to reach out to religious leaders. He said Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) head Happyton Bonyongwe was facilitating the bishops' efforts, including a meeting between the Mutare troika and Mugabe. Manhanga said he would use the meeting to push for reforms to support a national dialogue that could lead to "managed change" in Zimbabwe. The Ambassador said the USG was open to working with all parties toward positive change in Zimbabwe, but that a more constructive GOZ relationship with the democratic opposition and with the international community would require concrete first steps by the GOZ toward sustainable economic and political reform. End Summary.

Meeting Mugabe

[12](#). (C) In a meeting at the Embassy, Manhanga told the Ambassador that in spite of all the independent media's negative spin on Mugabe's recent engagements with the churches, Mugabe's tone and hands-on posture in their recent

meetings had given him hope that Mugabe was sincere in his desire to reach out. During a four-hour meeting with Mugabe and about a dozen other clerics at State House earlier in the month, Manhanga said Mugabe had clearly been listening to the religious leaders, taking his own notes, and refusing to be distracted by aides' interruptions. Although many clerics present had been sycophantic ZANU-PF supporters, others had been quite frank in their criticism of the GOZ, and in response Mugabe had acknowledged the non-performance of many in his cabinet.

13. (C) During the meeting with Mugabe, Manhanga said he had noted that he and Bishops Mutume and Bakare) the Mutare troika -- had "done the homework" Mugabe had assigned them two years ago and had approached both the MDC and western diplomats about what sort of government actions could lay a foundation for dialogue (reftels). However, they had been unable to get a promised follow-on appointment with the President to report their findings. Manhanga said Mugabe had acted surprised and had turned to Security/Lands Minister Mutasa and Justice Minister Chinamasa demanding to know why he hadn't been informed.

14. (C) Manhanga said after the meeting, CIO head Bonyongwe had approached him and promised to facilitate a meeting with Mugabe. He blamed Party Chairman John Nkomo and Secretary for Information Nathan Shamuyarira, who had been the bishops' earlier intermediaries with Mugabe, for their failure to secure a presidential meeting. Manhanga said he had tested Bonyongwe's sincerity with a request for an initial appointment with Bonyongwe, and, joined by two other senior CIO officials, Bonyongwe met the troika for two hours last week. Manhanga said Bonyongwe had promised to arrange a

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meeting with Mugabe following the latter's return from the AU Summit in Banjul.

Message to Mugabe

15. (C) The Ambassador asked Manhanga what issues he intended to raise with Mugabe when he finally saw him. Manhanga responded that he would urge Mugabe to "normalize" the domestic political situation as a foundation to support bridges with the international community. He would assert that inter-party differences were not as great as many believed and that Mugabe should meet with opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai. The MDC wanted improvements in the political environment but "the government's legitimacy was not a problem" for them. Broad-based constitutional reform was a possibility in that differences between various constitutional proposals (e.g, the GOZ's 2000 version and the NCA's draft) were not great. Even land reform offered common objectives -- transparent distribution to benefit the landless -- that could be agreed across political lines.

16. (C) The Ambassador noted that policy and process were the issues for the USG, not the identity of those in government. The USG would continue to evaluate GOZ policy with an open mind, even if there was considerable doubt about Mugabe's motives or will to follow through on commitments based on prior experience. The Ambassador questioned whether Mugabe was sincere this time or was simply biding time, as he had done so often in the past. Moreover, even if he had the will and apparent authority, would Mugabe be able to overcome resistance by an entrenched ruling elite deeply invested in the corrupted status quo? Manhanga agreed that these were fundamental questions on which he hoped to get a handle in the coming weeks.

17. (C) The Ambassador added that the first steps in any bridge-building exercise with the international community would have to come from the GOZ. To elicit engagement from the USG, those steps would have to involve concrete actions

that demonstrated clear commitment to genuine, serious and deep reforms. Meetings, while potentially constructive, would not be sufficient if not coupled with meaningful action. Security and Lands Minister Mutasa's land reform briefing for the diplomatic corps (ref A), for example, had been a publicity exercise that ignored the real issue of how to make the agricultural sector productive again. Only real reforms on the economic front -- secure land tenure, fiscal discipline, market-based exchange rates -- would get the international community's attention.

Meetings with Tsvangirai, Mujuru, Shumba

18. (C) Manhanga said he was scheduled to also meet separately with MDC anti-senate faction President Morgan Tsvangirai, former army chief and ZANU-PF kingmaker Solomon

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Mujuru, and United People's Party interim President Daniel Shumba (N.B. a political ally of Mujuru's principal intra-party rival, Emmerson Mnangagwa). Manhanga said that in his opinion no new political arrangement could go forward without the approval of Mujuru, who still held the upper hand within the ruling party. For its part, Manhanga observed, the MDC would need to tone its rhetoric down and be prepared

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to engage. The party needed to understand that it was in for a sustained struggle, not necessarily a climactic moment of change. He said he feared a national descent into chaos or violent internecine conflict, and hoped the bishops' effort would contribute to a process of peaceful managed change.

Comment

19. (C) The bishops' latest effort, however sincere, has a painfully familiar air about it and we are frankly skeptical that it will go any farther than their earlier forays. We see no evidence that Mugabe or those around him have even begun to consider the meaningful reforms that are a sine qua non of a national dialogue and of reengagement by the international community, a view reinforced by Mugabe's recent headline remarks rejecting the idea that Zimbabwe needed "rescuing" by Kofi Annan or anyone else. In our view, Mugabe instead likely hopes to use his engagement with the clerics to project a conciliatory posture to domestic and international audiences as his regime casts about desperately for a lifeline.

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